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INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA IMMEDIATE 0827  
RUEHAN/AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO IMMEDIATE 1126  
RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1700  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY 2573

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000598

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/28/09  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [AU](#) [MA](#) [FR](#)  
SUBJECT: FRENCH WORRIED BY MADAGASCAR

REF: ANTANANARIVO 304

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ANDREW R. YOUNG, REASONS 1.4b,d

¶1. (C) Summary: France fears a serious degradation in Madagascar as a worsening economic situation combined with targeted street violence threatens to unleash more radical civil upheaval and trigger a second coup to put a military junta in place, according to Presidential Africa Advisor Marechaux. The return of deposed President Ravalomanana to office is impossible, in the French view. His nemesis Rajoelina however has only nominal power, his popular support proving shortlived and shallow, with third parties seeking to inflame an already chaotic situation. The Government of France has direct equities, including the welfare of more than 20,000 French nationals in Madagascar, as well as the spillover for neighboring French island territories of Reunion and Mayotte, which depend directly on Madagascar for much of their food supply and other stock. MFA AF A/S-Equivalent Gompertz will be the sole GoF representative from Paris at the April 30 Madagascar International Contact Group (MICG) inaugural meeting in Addis Ababa. SADC should be present, Marechaux thought, based on a 20 April 2009 African Union (AU) communique; subregional organizations were routinely present at such gatherings, he added. Marechaux expected France would seek MICG condemnation of the spiking violence, call for the principal factions jockeying for power to agree on elements for a return to constitutional rule, and demand that Rajoelina either relinquish control of electoral coordination or abandon his own candidacy. End Summary.

¶2. (C/NF) Presidential Africa Advisor Marechaux pledged full transparency in explaining French thinking on Madagascar, openly sharing confidential messages and emails from the French mission in Antananarivo, during an April 28 meeting with Africa Watcher. France was gravely concerned that Madagascar was on the brink of further upheaval. He described targeted and gratuitous acts of violence against police and civil authorities intended to provoke repression, which he attributed to "quasi-Trotskyite" elements who hoped to exploit the ensuing chaos in favor of a return by deposed President Ravalomanana. Support for Rajoelina, forced to invoke security forces against crowds, was eroding quickly. An instrument of the moment in the upswell against Ravalomanana, Rajoelina persisted in the mistake of thinking he embodied the will of the people, yet his popular backing was in fact shallow and derived almost entirely from earlier demands for the ouster of Ravalomanana. Marechaux added the French confirmed Rajoelina's base was weak after their four consulates collectively reported a muted reception during the young leader's cross-country trek after the coup. Crowds turned out, but showed little warmth toward Rajoelina

personally, he claimed. Marechaux cited French ambassador to Madagascar Jean-Marc Chataigner's description of Rajoelina's "authoritarian habits" coupled with the assessment that there was no real leadership or firm grip at hand.

¶3. (C) Madagascar was in dire economic straits, Marechaux emphasized. Donors accounted for half its budget, even in normal circumstances. Some aid had already been cut in November 2008, before the IMF and World Bank stopped assistance after the March coup. There was no new French or EU assistance, only what had already been in the pipeline before the coup. France would not/not bail out the High Transitional Authority (HAT) in meeting upcoming payroll and other expenses, Marechaux insisted (ref). French assistance funding was already committed elsewhere and, even were there any flexibility, Madagascar would not be the only supplicant within sub-Saharan Africa. Compliance with Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement on the need to restore legal authority would condition any European or bilateral aid to Madagascar, Marechaux stated. France in no way sought to delay a formal European review of Article 96, which he thought would go forward circa 18 May. Rather than see Madagascar's economic distress as leverage for advancing an expedited electoral calendar, Marechaux feared the HAT's inability to meet bills in June could trigger a second coup that would usher in a military junta.

¶4. (C/NF) Marechaux discounted reports he would attend the 4/30 MICG meeting in Addis, stating the MFA has responsibility for Contact Group meetings and the French Presidency does not participate on principle. MFA AF A/S-Equivalent Gompertz would be the sole representative from

PARIS 00000598 002 OF 002

Paris, flanked by Jean-Christoph Belliard, the French ambassador to Ethiopia and the AU and former Africa advisor to EC High Commissioner Solana. SADC should be present, Marechaux thought, based on a 20 April 2009 African Union (AU) communique; subregional organizations were routinely present at such gatherings, he added. France wanted to support the African Union, which was leading the meeting, and had no ulterior agenda, according to Marechaux. Gompertz, based on Chataigner's recommendations from Antananarivo, would likely seek MICG condemnation of the spiking violence, call for the principal factions jockeying for power (Ravalomanana, Rajoelina, Zafi, and Rajirak) to reach agreement, however limited, on elements for a return to constitutional rule, and demand that Rajoelina either relinquish coordination of electoral planning or abandon his own candidacy. Marechaux volunteered France had a favorable relationship with AU Special Envoy Ablasse Ouedraogo, the former Burkinabe Foreign Minister. He was less keen on UN Mediator Tiebile Drame, whose efforts in Madagascar, he suggested, were not well-regarded.

¶5. (C/NF) Marechaux was dismissive of SADC's moral authority, suggesting its official position, as formulated in Swaziland, was posturing, and that the regional leadership, in private conversations, was much more cynical and direct. The views of SADC officials in Antananarivo did not conform to the Swaziland statement, he claimed. Marechaux offered disdainfully that SADC's advocacy of democracy for Madagascar was a hypocritical attempt to compensate for its craven policies on Zimbabwe. (Comment: Marechaux, while questioning SADC motives, did not reject the value of the SADC statement or its content. End Comment.)

¶6. (C/NF) Comment: Marechaux, who was an exchange diplomat at the Department of State, is a candid interlocutor with an imposing breadth of expertise. Before moving to the French Presidency in 2007, he served two years as the AF DAS-Equivalent overseeing French policy in Madagascar and the SADC region. Marechaux, like his boss Joubert, wants to prove France has decisively turned the page on the past shadowy practices that made up France-Afrique. His efforts at transparency on this occasion were strenuous -- actually

making available for our viewing the latest cable from the French ambassador in Madagascar as well as rifling through email traffic with Africa Watcher to show that the recent trip to Madagascar by so-called Africa-fixer Robert Bourgi had no official endorsement and no relevance to French policy. (Bourgi, he commented, does provide valuable advice to the GoF on Senegal, Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville. However, Bourgi is at bottom a free-lancer and lobbyist who tries to enhance his commercial profile by playing up his alleged importance through artful leaks to trade journals like La Lettre du Continent, according to Marechaux.) End Comment.

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